

I. BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

THE WARS OF ISRAEL: AN EASTERN ORTHODOX POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT. The war of God orchestrated by His people Israel, has a profound dimension both theological and pedagogical, through this belligerent manner, in the case of the occupation of Canaan, YHWH wishes to exterminate the idolatrous population that could no longer correct itself because their hearts were darkened, in order to replace it with Israel, the holy people, in the middle of which Messiah, the Savior of the world will be born. The law of the war of Yahweh from Deut 20 is the guide the Israelites use for this war, and the social dimension of this law places Israel on a clearly superior position in comparison with the other nations from an ethical point of view. The logical stages of the war of YHWH must be respected entirely, for Israel to be victorious in his armed confrontation with his idolatrous neighbors. The incapacity of the Israelites to obey strictly the laws of the war and their alienation from the ethical perspective of the armed battles, announce indirectly the necessity of the coming of Messiah and of the universal time of peace.

Keywords: the war of YHWH, ethics, Joshua and Canaan, war strategy.

Biblical Premises

Apart from all the historical causes for starting a war, even a world war, there is a cause that comprises all the other, namely the spiritual cause. All the other natural causes originate from here. Both the ancient and the modern wars cannot be interpreted authentically, except for a biblical interpretation. That is because God, the Lord Sabaoth, as the Jewish called Him, suggesting the image of God as warrior (1Sam 17: 25), a name given to the greatness and omnipotence

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of God¹ (Isa 24: 21-23; Zech 3: 9-10), the one who allows the beginning and the ending of each war. Saint Nicholas Velimirović says that the spiritual truth that can be identified behind every armed battle is, broadly, the following: the sins of the people or of the rulers, against the law of God brings without a doubt the defeat; only justice and purity of the people and their ruler brings the long-awaited victory².

Apart from the hardening of the hearts out of evilness and turpitude, as is the case of Pharaoh (Exod 7: 3), or of the Canaanites and Amorites (Deut 2: 30; Josh 11: 20), to raise against the sons of God and to be defeated eventually; there is a final purpose of God, above world, a purpose that conserves and leads the world to its fulfillment (Rom 8: 26) and that can hardly be understood by the human mind³. This is what we are going to talk about in the following.

The sanctifying war in the Old Testament

Before all, it is necessary to explain a terminological-conceptual matter. God does not involve directly into any of the extermination wars carried by the Israelites, for He is the God of life not of death. Only once He deals with death that is on the Cross, defeating it through Resurrection. It is necessary to go beyond the literal meaning of the Old Testament regarding the active involvement of the Lord into the battle campaigns of His people, looking at the only war commanded by God, which is that against passions and sins, according to the paradigm from *Ephesians* 6. In all the other cases, war is permitted by God and consumed only in special cases – YHWH does not actually kill anybody for He says clearly, even from the Old Testament: *"Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, people of Israel?"* (Ezek 33: 11). But sinners, because they hate the Lord and repentance, fall into the hands of the people of God, in this case Israel, who is not in disposition to show mercy to them, and for those people, the Judgement of the Lord is decided. All these that do not return to God will die, those who fall into the swords of Israel, die just a moment earlier – they chose their fate themselves. And Israel in this case, becomes only an instrument for punishment in the hands of God, just as Israel that became idolatrous, will fall into the hands of the heathen that have become a correction instrument in the Hand of the same God (Hab 1: 6-12). But it is not God the one who kills, for He

¹ William Dyrness, *Teme ale Teologiei Vechiului Testament* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Logos, 2010), 47-48.

² Nicolae Velimirovici, *Războiul și Biblia* (București: Editura Sophia, 2010), 161.

³ Athanase Negoită, *Teologia biblică a Vechiului Testament* (București: Editura Sophia, 2004), 76-77.

waits until the final moment a pale intention of correction from the part of the sinner, so that He can save the latter from death (Joel 2: 12-14). God cannot be the Lord of death in the Old Testament and the Lord of life in the New Testament, for His nature is unchangeable (Heb 13: 8). He has the same punishment for the sinners that cannot correct themselves at all, in the New Testament as well (the case of Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5: 1-10). The idea of war can also be encountered in the New Testament, the book of Revelation speaks about the war of the lamb (17: 14) and His victory⁴. That is why the statement of J. Wellhausen cannot stand, because he said that God chose an armed people to lead into bloody wars, thus war being at the level of identity, the heart of the Judaic religion⁵. This matter of a warrior God, depends mostly on the conceptual limitations of some anthropomorphic expressions such as *YHWH is a warrior killing with His sword all the enemies of Israel*, and on the culture of that epoch. Having a fragile geopolitics, with strong enemies on all the borders, Israel could survive psychologically only by inspiring itself from the common mentality that dictated the presence of a powerful god within at the heart of the army, him being the supreme leader into wars, who offered them victory. That is because Israel still had a frail faith, and felt continuously menaced by enemies, although Yahweh assures the people that He will keep them alive as long as they observe the covenant from Sinai (Exod 19: 3-8). Because of these cultural conditions it is necessary to go beyond the literary expressions regarding war, borrowed by the Israelites from the heathen they came into contact with, in order to truly understand Yahweh, who is the Lord of love and mercy⁶ (Exod 34: 5-7: *"Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, 'The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished'"*). As proof that Israel did not really know God and did not believe in Providence, we have the text from Isa 30: 1-3, when the hebrews abandon

⁴ Lois Barrett, *The Way God Fights: War and Peace in the Old Testament* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 1987), 14.

⁵ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Cleveland and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 321.

⁶ King Solomon, and all the other kings that followed, consolidated their power by participating to all sorts of political plots, which clouded the real knowledge of YHWH and His involvement more or less into the wars of Israel. But this is not the case of the prophets who continued to see the glory of God, not the majesty and the power of their kings, who expressed by this the obsession for the expansion of Israel, in direct conflict with the requirements of the Covenant between God and Moses. See Bruce Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Hebrew Scriptures, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 224-228.

Yahweh and ask for help and security from the Egyptians⁷. The text from Hos 14: 4 must be interpreted in the same context of the religious collapse!

The reality through which God guides his people to occupy the land of the promised Canaan (Gen 15: 18-21), taking it through all sorts of armed conflicts, in which each time He was called, He did involve personally (Josh 10: 8-11; Judg 4: 14; Hab 3: 8-9), and then all the military actions to defend the land inherited from the time of the judges and of the kings of Israel, were, most often, interpreted wrongly as “holy wars”⁸. This notion is truly mistaken, for it has nothing in common with the Judaism of the Old Testament or with the Eastern Christianity. This concept occurs for the first time in Greek, but lately it has been wrongfully transferred to the world of the Old Covenant, through the contribution of the german biblicist Friederich Schwally⁹. But it is not just that. Another renowned specialist of the biblicism of the Old Testament, this time Gerhard von Rad, in one of his brochures named suggestively “Holy War in Ancient Israel”¹⁰, which was highly appreciated in the world of researchers, stated that this name is in fact a creation of the tribes of Israel, based on amphictyony – that is their religious confederation. But this new theory of amphictyony has no historical support, nor a biblical one, because the Holy Scripture calls them clearly “the wars of YHWH” (*milhamot Yahwe*) in 1Sam 25: 28, or the “Wars against the enemies of YHWH” in Judg 5: 31. The idea of a “holy war” (jihad) is of Islamic origin, being Mohammed’s creation, also called the “oath of alliance for war”, through which he ordered to answer violence with violence. This concept is a purely religious one, for it wishes to Islamize the whole world, and sentences to death those who do not want to obey. In Quran, sura II, 190-191¹¹ it is written: „*Fight in the cause of God those who fight you... Kill them wherever you overtake them, and expel them from where they had expelled you. Oppression is more serious than murder...; if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the retribution of the disbelievers*”. Moreover, a contemporary islamologist, Ahmad Taheri, stated in 1990 the essence of what the “holy war”

⁷ Lois Barrett, *The Way God Fights*, 13.

⁸ Researcher A. Deijl says that he cannot find anywhere in the Scriptures this concept of *holy war*, neither with the classical meaning of the term (war as amphictyony), nor in the modern sense (a religious war). Moreover, he comes to the conclusion that this name of *holy war* is a pleonasm because in the Ancient Near East, all the aspects of life, war included, were regarded from a religious perspective and that is why the adjective holy has no business in the context of war. See Aarnoud van der Deijl, *Protest or Propaganda: War in the Old Testament Book of Kings and in Contemporaneous Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 685.

⁹ Alexandru Mihăilă, *(Ne)lămuriri din Vechiul Testament. Mici comentarii la mari texte* vol. 1, (București: Editura Nemira, 2011), 399; Friedrich Schwally, *Semitische Altertümer* vol. 1: *Der heilige Krieg im Alten Testament*, (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1901).

¹⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 41-51.

¹¹ *THE HOLY QUR'AN* trans. by Maulawī Sher' Alī, (Tilford: Islam International Publications, 2004).

means in the Islamic world – an antagonical vision of the Revelation comprised in the Scriptures: “*Muslims have the obligation to defend their territory against the aggression of the disbelievers and in the same time, to conquer the world of the disbelievers until Islam will rule the whole planet. The fight of Islam will cease only when all the people will have received the Islamic faith or will have obeyed its rulers – the border of Islam is the border of the whole world*”¹².

As opposed to the “holy war” of Mohammed, which aims to convert the entire world through crimes and violence, the ancient conflicts of Israel, as chosen people of God, are commanded directly by YHWH, though not all of them, and Israel has the divine right to inherit Canaan, according to the promise made to Abraham, as we have already seen above. And this genocide orchestrated and allowed by God precisely for the huge sins of those people, with the purpose to cut evil from its roots, as the Scripture says: “*In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure*” (Gen 15: 16). God’s kindness is also shown by the fact that he tolerates their sins for years, until Israel will conquer Palestine under the rule of Joshua. Thus, Abraham’s descendants will occupy the Promised Land, also involving a retributive judgment on the inhabitants of the land of Canaan – when the absolute righteousness will insistently ask for it¹³. The name Amorites was a collective name used for all the inhabitants of Canaan (Gen 48: 22; Josh 24: 15). Their capital sins, that draw God’s wrath are not very well known, but through comparisons and analogies we may guess a few of them. The memory of their sins persisted in the Judaic collective mind, providing an element of comparison for the idolatry of Ahab and Manasseh¹⁴ (1Kgs 21: 26; 2Kgs 21: 11). We thus understand that their destruction was caused by the sin of idolatry with all its surrogates lacking moral, that is why I think the best name is that of war for the purification of the place, a *war of consecration, preparation* (Hebr. *qiddešû milhamâ*) or the *war of consecration of Yahweh* (Hebr. *qaddešû milhamâ YHWH*).

This terminological perspective is not new to the theological fundament of the Old Testament, for we find clear texts regarding the relationship between war and consecration: there is the expression “to consecrate the war” from Joel 4: 9; the holiness of God or His dedication (*herem*) also means the “war of extermination” or destruction of the idolatrous with all their belongings from 1Sam 15: 3; the warriors were requested both vigilance (Judg 7: 5-7) and

¹² Nicolae Achimescu, *Universul religios în care trăim* (București: Editura TRINITAS, 2013), 362; Klaus Kienzler, *Der religiöse Fundamentalismus. Christentum, Judentum, Islam* (München: Beck Verlag, 2002), 72.

¹³ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1985), 57.

¹⁴ J.D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: William B.Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 37-38.

abstinence (1Sam 21: 5-7) – moral goods of the act of consecration. The war of consecration of YHWH comes into close relationship with the idea of judgment of the Lord, having salvation as final purpose. Because the nations were heading straight towards the alienation from God, the people of Israel is chosen to maintain the light amidst the darkness of sins, thus carrying the flag of the monotheistic faith. Since the other nations chose to remain in darkness, they are gradually removed from the face of the earth (Isa 10: 5; Hab 1: 2) – and here Israel has a contribution, leading Yahweh's war of consecration, all these being part of the great plan of the Lord regarding the redemption of man. Hence, when "the set time has fully come" God sends upon the nations that have reached the final limit of evilness, His divine punishment, which is most often synonymous with their extermination (Exod 23: 27; Josh 24: 12). And the strongest argument focuses on the fact that the sins of the heathen were directed not only against Israel as people, but also against the righteousness and holiness of the Lord¹⁵ (Zeph 2: 10-11). Their extermination was on the other hand a pedagogical act of Yahweh through which He kept His people pure, so that when "the set time has fully come", the definitive peace and the salvation of all the people can be achieved by Christ – Prince of Peace (Isa 9: 5-6). The new era of the universal peace brought by Jesus Christ will end all wars of extermination, because consecration will no longer be defended with the sword, but it will be open to all the nations that will believe in Messiah (Isa 66: 19; Mic 5: 7; Zech 13: 1).

The messianic era, teaches us a new war of consecration, but this time it is a spiritual war, a war of permanent *askesis*, a fight against the passions that are deeply rooted into the nature of the old man, subjected to corruption (Rom 7: 17). This unseen war, necessitates the clothing of the entire armor of the lord, and the armor is a metaphorical expression of the new, spiritual man (Eph 6: 10-17). The Greek word used by the apostle is *panoplia* which refers to the full military spiritual equipment (with the belt of truth buckled around the waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, with the feet ready for the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit). Each of this pieces that form the armor is of vital importance for our spiritual fight, and where one of these is missing, the fate of the entire war is seriously endangered. The genitive used within the text (*toû Theou*) which means "of the Lord" shows us the fact that the weapons used within the fight are not ours, and that is why we need to ask for them ardently from God when we see that they become weak in our life. We thus understand the serious nature of the war, in which our life depends on the grace of God, because without His help we would be swallowed by Satan and his fighters that is the evil spirits (2Cor 10: 4; 1Pet 5: 8: *"Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring*

¹⁵ Athanase Negoiță, *Teologia biblică*, 178.

lion looking for someone to devour"). In this spiritual fight, the apostle also underlines the following aspect: the verb *dínasthai* urges us to fight against our enemy at all cost, and never abandon the fight. Because our resistance against the spirits of evil proves the liberation from the shackle of sin and our new status is maintained only through spiritual awakening¹⁶. Theodoret of Cyrus¹⁷ in his commentary on the epistle to Ephesians says that the war must be focused only against the devil and his temptations, and in all the other cases the wise Christian must live in peace with his fellows (6: 15), because the prophet mentions the beauty of the one who proclaims peace (Isa 52: 7 "...How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvations, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"). Saint John Cassian speaks of a particular manner of fighting against demons, reminding us of the monks who kept the demons away especially at night, through the chant of psalms, through prayer and spiritual readings. They took turns so that there was someone awake at all times and ready for the spiritual fight¹⁸. Now we see why in the next verse, the apostle urges us to pray at all times for all the people (Eph 6: 18), because this is the only way we will have our minds permanently focused on prayer and spiritual meditation and we will no longer have the occasion to sin.

There are some particular elements regarding the form and the content that offer a special note to Joshua's war, in comparison with the ideological wars of the nations from the Ancient Near East¹⁹.

¹⁶ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books Publisher, 1990), 442-443.

¹⁷ Teodoret al Cirului, *Tâlcuire la Epistolele Sfântului Apostol Pavel*, vol. 1 (Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2015), 92.

¹⁸ Augustine Casiday, *Tradiție și Teologie în scrierile Sfântului Ioan Casian* (Iași: Editura Doxologia, 2015), 261-262.

¹⁹ Although we meet powerful similitudes between the event of the fall of Jericho and the ancient war campaigns described in the Epic of Gilgamesh (epic XI, II 141-146), where for example the Ugaritic king Keret, after performing several religious rituals, on seven consecutive days, in which for six days he repeats a military scheme that he will perfect on the seventh day, he defeats Pabil. The same happens in the case of the conquest of Jericho by the Jewish. The psychological function of this war strategy is to neutralize the enemies, by drawing them into the trap of false security, by repeating several non-violent acts, which will end in the form of the most surprising attack. To this respect see Sa-Moon Kang, *Divine War in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 144-145. Other researchers, in the light of the recent archaeological discoveries, look with a suspicious eye to the narration of Jericho, because according to the calculi of the specialists from the excavation site in Jericho, it seems that this city was destroyed long before the arrival of the Jewish, around 1560 BC. But there are some archaeological information that there have been some human settlements in Jericho around 1400-1325 BC against which Joshua and his army actually fought. But it is strongly stated that Jericho in the time of Joshua was not at all a big imposing and attractive city. See Mark Healy, *Warriors of the Old Testament* (Poole: Firebird Books, 1989), 24.

The classical scheme according to which Israel acts is the following: the army receives a rapport regarding the enemy and his fight capacity; Yahweh decides that the enemy is already given into the hands of the winners; in the end there is a rapport of the battle justifying the manner in which Israel conquered the spoils²⁰. The narrative of the book of Joshua has a peculiarity worthy of our attention, the people fight in order to conquer a land that was given to them by God, and within this military process, the idea of a war of consecration, may be focused on this theme. In comparison with the bloody ideology of the “holy war” that belongs to the heathen, which is focused mainly on the territorial and religious expansion with the help of raw force. That is why I think that the specialist of the Old Testament, the German theologian Gerhard von Rad, rushed into saying that the wars of the Jews bear the ideological mark of the “holy war” from the idolatrous environments²¹. But Silviu Tatu expresses a very inspired idea to this respect, because he understands through the colonization of Canaan the fulfillment of God’s commandment to exterminate evil that had become cult and to establish the basis of a theocracy governed by the Law of Moses. That is why, he says, the war of Israel is different from that of the violent nations, through the fact that it rather resembles a revolution through which a corrupt and oppressive govern is destabilized²².

A particular case: God’s war of consecration (Jer 6: 4; Mic 3: 5; Joel 4: 9)

The consecration war in the Name of God occurs long before the pre-exilic prophets, this idea can be identified even in the time of Moses, in the sequence of “the Song of Moses” from Exod 15, especially in the part of text called by the specialists in the macro and micro structural analysis of the Old Testament, as the “poetical discourse”²³. Within this poetical discourse of the

²⁰ Gordon Mitchell, *Together in the Land. A Reading of the Book of Joshua* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 24-26.

²¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Der Heilige Krieg im alten Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1969).

²² Silviu Tatu, “Iosua”, in *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament. Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, ed. Silviu Tatu, (Oradea: Editura Casa Cărții, 2016), 274.

²³ Richard M. Davidson, “The Eschatological Literary Structure of the Old Testament”, in *Creation, Life and Hope: Essays in Honour of Jacques B.Doukhan*, ed. Jirí Moskala (Michigan: Andrews University Press, 2000), 350.

text of the Old Testament, we may easily identify the typological elements²⁴ of the biblical text, suggesting to the reader an eschatological key of the text. This type of discourse aims directly to put in a relationship of continuity the theological events such as *the Lord of our parents – the Lord of the Covenant from Sinai – the Creator God*, thus suggesting God's unicity in comparison with the idols of the heathen people²⁵. Such a concept with deep significances is the war of consecration, of offering to God in respecting the commandment of perpetual consecration (Lev 19: 2). A typological event from the past, which was filtered through the prophetic image mentioned above, especially that of prophet Joel (4: 9) – finds its antitype or the completion of the action within the war with the passions described briefly by apostle Paul in Eph 6. The typological-eschatological verse from the Song of Moses is v. 13: *"In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling"*.

We notice especially in the time of Joshua (5: 13 – 6: 27) that the war preparations are rather of a spiritual nature than military, most of the times ignoring the established technique for the close-handed war in favor of the spiritual aspects²⁶. The majority of the important texts regarding war in the Old Testament speak of a consecrating dimension with respect to the preparations for the war of God. The future soldiers of Yahweh were obliged to maintain a state of purity, of holiness (Deut 23: 10-15; Josh 3: 5: *"Joshua told the people "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things among you"; 1Sam 21: 6*). We can't know for sure what were the actions to which this

²⁴ *Typos* is a sign, a pattern, a mask, a symbol that announces a reality that will be revealed, hence, certain events, objects, beings and persons of the Old testament, prefigures a new reality, which is highly superior. The *typos* belongs to the sacred time, announcing a pattern of fulfillment competing with each other in a simultaneous closeness. For example, both Eve (whose eyes are lightless) and the Virgin Mary (offering light to everyone) symbolize the condition of the whole world and of each of us; that is why we may say together with Saint Ephrem the Syrian that the type hides an unseen power. Such is the typological relationship between the old Adam through whom sin came into the world and the new Adam – Christ, through whom we got salvation (Rom 5: 12-19; 1Cor 15: 22). Such is the typological relationship between Sarah and Agar, in relation to Abraham, developed in the Epistle to Galatians, where the two women represent the two Testaments (the legalist Judaism and the Christian Church). It is exactly the case of the parallel between Melchizedek – Christ; the sea as image of the baptism; the cloud as a sign of the Holy Spirit; the manna as a prophetic image of the Lord's Supper; etc. See Vasile Mihoc, „Sensul tipic al Vechiului Testament după 1 Corinteni 10, 1-11,” *Mitropolia Ardealului* 4-6 (1976): 274; Vasile Mihoc, „Tipologia ca metodă de interpretare creștină a Vechiului Testament,” *Altarul Banatului* 7-9 (1997): 31; Frances M. Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 157.

²⁵ Ioan Chirilă, „Structura Literar Eshatologică a Vechiului Testament. Analiza Macrostructurală,” *Studia Ubb Theol Orth* 2 (2013): 9.

²⁶ Silviu Tatu, *Revendicarea moștenirii. 13 mesaje din Iosua* (Oradea: Editura Metanoia, 2010), 82.

urge of consecration before the start of the war was dedicated, but we may suppose a certain state of *askesis* (Judg 20: 26; 1Sam 21: 6; 2Sam 11: 11). Very interesting within this frame is the text from 2Sam 1: 21: “*Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, may no showers fall on your terraced fields. For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul – no longer rubbed with oil*”, which may refer, as we may well observe, to a possible consecration of the weapons²⁷.

The established expression of “holy war” cannot be found anywhere within the Old Testament, understood literally as the Islamic circles do, but we do find the three texts of the prophets mentioned above (Jer 6: 4; Mic 3: 5; Joel 4: 9). These verses put in a relationship of complementarity within the same verse, the noun “war” (*milhama*) and the verb “to consecrate” (*qadaš*). The presence of the verb *qadaš* within this phrase compels us to translate the holy text in the key of an armed conflictual preparation. From a grammatical point of view, the phrase *milhama qadaš* differs a little bit in the three prophets, but blends within the context: in prophet Micah the verb occurs in the form *piel perfect*, which means that it refers to the false prophets; but in prophets Jeremiah and Joel the verb uses the form *piel imperative*, and the subject of the action are the enemies of Israel²⁸.

The first one in chronological order is Mic 3: 5: “*This is what the Lord says: As for the prophets who lead my people astray, they proclaim ‘peace’ if they have something to eat, but prepare to wage war against anyone who refuses to feed them*”. The context invoked here sanctions the corruption of the fake prophets from Israel, who have rallied according to the manners of their greedy rulers (Mic 2: 1-11), fake prophets that have become the enemies of the Law of Moses (Deut 13: 1-5). They were leading the people astray, pretending to communicate prophetic messages inspired directly by God (Deut 18: 21-22; 1Kgs 22: 19-28). Defeatists in origins, spiritual corruption had become their true prophecy²⁹ (Num 22: 7; Neh 6: 12; Ezek 13: 19). The verb used here for “proclaim” (וְקִרְאָה) rather means, strictly literally “to consecrate”, the expression referring to the consecration of the war, referring indirectly to the religious ceremonies³⁰ (1Sam 13: 8-12; Jer 6: 4; Isa 13: 3). From a literally point of view, the established expression “*qiddešû milhamâ*” (*consecrate the war*), in

²⁷ Cătălin Vătămanu, “Războiul sfânt din perspectiva Vechiului Testament,” *Studii Teologice* 3 (2006): 104.

²⁸ Cătălin Vătămanu, “Războiul sfânt”, 101.

²⁹ David W. Baker and T. Desmond Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 192.

³⁰ John Merlin Powis Smith and William Hayes Ward, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Micah, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Obadiah and Joel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1959), 75.

prophet Micah has nothing to do with the idea of an armed conflict, but refers to the imposture of the fake prophets who deceived people with war rumors so that the frightened people gave them gifts in exchange for their prayers for peace³¹. Their moral depravation is also underlined by the verb that describes the bite of their teeth, similar to that of a poisonous snake, so that the prophecy of the Lord upon the disbelievers may fulfill (Jer 8: 17; Amos 5: 19). They draw God's wrath upon them also because they proclaim peace (*šālôm*), which in the collective mind represented the blessing of salvation (Deut 28: 1-14). The word *shalom* comprises a large area of meanings (physical health, social harmony, economic stability and political certainty), and they promised all these goods without having a direct investment from God, and taking the term out of its ethical and religious context (Jer 6: 14; Ezek 13: 10), hence a usurpation of the authority of God³². Their punishment was imminent because nobody had the moral authority to proclaim peace and salvation except for those who were faithful to Yahweh.

The next text is that from Jer 6: 4: *"Prepare for battle against her! Arise, let us attack at noon! But, alas, the daylight is fading, and the shadows of evening grow long"*. We find here the same expression of consecration of the war as an act of cult, belonging to the war of consecration of Yahweh. The broad theme of the imminence of the war that dominated chapters 4-5 can also be observed here, in chapter 6. Exactly like in the previous chapters from Jeremiah, this too is a composition of several pieces, oracles –that is why, the verse presented above is part of the context from verses 1-8: a poem that describes the enemies' approach from the North with the purpose to besiege the city of Jerusalem. Hence, the prophet receives the message from the Lord (verses 6-8) which states clearly that the invasion is commanded by God Himself because of the sins of His people. However, this national disaster may be avoided only if Jerusalem repents for its sins³³ (v. 8). This can be easily observed from the prepositional phrase (אֶלָּיָהּ) "against it", which is a grammatical construction that refers to a timeless relationship between the affected entity (Jerusalem) and the actors of this imminent war³⁴ (Assyrians). God's mercy gives forth, the conquest of Jerusalem is possible (its deportation in Babylon later on

³¹ Cătălin Vătămanu, "Războiul sfânt", 107.

³² Philip Peter Jensen, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 134-135.

³³ John Bright, *Jeremiah. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 48-49.

³⁴ Elizabeth R. Hayes, *The Pragmatics of Perception and Cognition in MT Jeremiah 1:1 – 6:30. A Cognitive Linguistics Approach* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 218.

strengthens this clause), but He can stop the invaders from the North only if the people shows signs of repentance. One may speak in the case of verses 4-5 of a council in the camp of the Nordics regarding a future invasion (with the meaning to start the fight or to prepare the fight). No matter what the decision is, the Lord is the one who will govern people's decisions, according to His pedagogical plan of restoration of His people fallen into idolatry³⁵.

The last one in chronological order is Joel 4: 9: "*Proclaim this among the nations! Prepare for war (qaddešû milhamâ)! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men approach and attack!*". The extended context presents God's decision to bring all the nations together in the valley of Jehoshaphat so that He can judge them through war (3: 1-3). This verse prepares Israel for the consecrating war, and its target is presented through the repetition of the verbs "proclaim/come" all the nations. The following verse portrays the military equipment of the pre-exilic times, precisely to underline the imminence of the war. The classical call to war observed by the prophet Joel carries a certain dose of irony in prophet Isaiah (21: 5) who describes the warriors eating and drinking, and not waiting for a quick war. The divine judgement aims not only to proclaim the sentence, but to act on this sentence through the consummation of the final battle. Prophet Joel receives from God a message that is similar to the prophecies of Isa (8: 9; 17: 1-14), Zech (12-14) and Ezek (38-39), where the Zion celebrates in a cultic manner the victory of God upon all His enemies³⁶. The seriousness with which this war approaches is given by the very commandment of Yahweh, sent either through His prophets, or through His angels charged to proclaim Judgement to all the nations. The expression we find here *qaddešû milhamâ* derives from the image of the wars of God, which consumes under His strict command. It bears a strong cultic background, there is a commandment regarding the fulfillment of the sacrifices and burnt offerings that prepared the consummation of the war of YHWH (1Sam 7: 8-9; Jer 51: 27), led by the warriors of the Lord who were especially consecrated in order to fulfill this mission (Isa 13: 3: "*I have commanded those I prepared for battle; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath – those who rejoice in my triumph*"³⁷).

³⁵ William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* vol. 1, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 141-142.

³⁶ Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 149-150.

³⁷ John Merlin Powis Smith and William Hayes WARD, *A Critical and Exegetical*, 550.

The nomosic and social dimension of the war of Yahweh (Deut 20)

The laws of the war of Yahweh are presented within this nomosic chapter, it is the reference text for our theme, and that is why I left at the end, for a more careful analysis. Of course, some of the elements here can be found in the cases we have discussed previously, but all those are special cases, which reflect the manner in which Israel applied or not the law of the war of God. Surely, Deut 20 remains the normative biblical text with respect to an objective approach of the theme *qaddešu milhamâ*. The historical criticism that penetrated to us from the direction of J. Derrida, rushed into stigmatizing this only text of the Old Testament, of an exhaustless human richness, considering this chapter of the Law, to be idealistic and not at all anchored into the concrete reality³⁸. We will not comment on this statement. It's superfluous!

Very suggestive in the economy of the war, becomes the importance of the priest in the moral preparation of the future warriors (20: 2-4). They (the priests) had the role to cheer the army through a series of persuasive discourses regarding God's providence. But this is only one of the functions of the priest in times of war. Besides this, the priests were responsible for the sacrifices before the starting of the battle, and some priests were even present on the field, carrying the tabernacle of the Covenant before the army of God³⁹, as we have observed along this study.

From afar one may observe a striking social dimension in this law of the war offered by God, the law in itself being a self-sufficient argument to support the unicity of the war of God in comparison with the holy war of Jihadist type. Based on this text, we may observe how the Israelites' behavior during war was very moderate, in the situation in which the enemy opened his gates willingly, he was granted peace and the city was not robbed, but they settled only on a tribute. In case of resistance, the social preoccupation of the Jewish dominated the entire situation: the women and children were spared, women were respected, the animals were saved from death, fruit trees were not destroyed⁴⁰. The only exception we see is in verses 16-18: *"However, in the cities of the nations the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, do not leave alive anything that breathes. Completely destroy them—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—as the Lord your God has commanded you."*

³⁸ M.H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: its composition and its authorship and other Biblical studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press/Hebrew University, 1967), 80.

³⁹ T. Fish, "War and Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 23 (1939): 395-396.

⁴⁰ Claudiu Dumea, *Pagini dificile ale Vechiului Testament* (Iași: Sapientia, 2011), 234.

Otherwise, they will teach you to follow all the detestable things they do in worshiping their gods, and you will sin against the Lord your God", when the occupants of Canaan will have to be put to death from child to man, with all their animals and belongings, an extreme measure accepted by God with a pedagogical purpose, so that His people consecrated through battle does not contaminate with the sins of the heathen nations.

It seems that this social behavior of the people of Yahweh can be found in the Palestinian environment at the end of the Bronze Age (around 1500 BC – 1155 BC) and the beginning of the Iron Age (around 1200 – 600 BC), as the archaeological proofs testify. During this period all the great social and political falls of the royal palaces in the area of Palestine take place. Also, the military system collapses. The military specialists (*maryannu*) that have received great benefits from their king and were provided with the best weapons disappear as well. The researchers state that a new military paradigm was born based on this regional decline, not regarding the battle techniques (the horses and chariots remained effective for many centuries), but regarding the military politics, referring especially to the methods of recruitment and to the social-political relationships involved in the armed confrontations⁴¹. It is possible that this social dimension of the wars of Israel also influenced the mentality of these civilizations, through the direct and indirect interactions. Anyway, here we observe a powerful positive influence of Israel upon the neighboring nations. Especially that we have the narrations of the war campaigns of Pharaoh Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, Seti I and Ramesses II, who bragged about their pillage, prisoners, granaries burnt and trees cut in conditions of besiege. A manner of fight completely opposed to that of Israel⁴².

The social dimension may also be observed from the nature of the wars led by Joshua, in this sphere violence (*hamas*) did not find a place because it was perceived as a frontal attack against the majesty of the Lord. Joshua's campaign is based on God's commandment to exterminate evil from Canaan and to put the basis of a theocracy that is a society governed by the Law of God given through Moses. Hence, we may speak in prosaic terms of a revolution through which an oppressive government is destroyed⁴³.

The Law of Yahweh's war has five main points of a profound social sublayer, where the special care of God for man can be observed, a care for man's smallest needs. Firstly, the one who had built a new home and did not

⁴¹ Mario Liverani, *Israel's History and the History of Israel* (London: Equinox, 2007), 41.

⁴² James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, 234-241.

⁴³ Silviu Tatu, *Introducere în studiul Vechiului Testament. Pentateuhul și cărțile istorice*, (Oradea: Editura Casa Cărții), 2016, 274.

have the chance to use it (*hānak*) was excepted from military service (20: 5). Such a social understanding is also offered to the one who has recently planted a vineyard and has not eaten from its fruits yet. This concession could lead to up to five years of rest (Lev 19: 23-25). Another case of permissiveness is that of the man recently engaged, who could benefit from an exception of maximum one year (Deut 24: 5). Much more affectionate becomes in this scenario the exception from war of the coward who has a weak heart. The moral of the army must not be altered because the army was entirely dedicated to God and anyone who influenced this faith had to be removed (20: 8-9). Cowardice thus becomes a problem of spiritual nature and will later on be solved by Saint Paul (Phil 1: 28) who says loud and clear: “...without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God”. A final social arrangement that I have mentioned above refers to the interdiction of cutting the trees from the lands of the enemies (20: 19-20). Since God will give the whole country, disobeying this commandment would mean an act of conceit against the creation of the Lord⁴⁴.

We observe here in the last commandment of God a careful preoccupation for His creation, an ecological concern. The teaching on the environment is abundant in the theology of the Old Testament⁴⁵, and it will also

⁴⁴ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge*, 301-302.

⁴⁵ Taking a better look at the Holy Scripture, we may identify some answers to the question: That does the Bible say about the conservation of creation? Hence, we offer the following picture: the natural world is created by God and He rests in it (Gen 1: 31a; Heb 1: 2); creation is good (Gen 1: 4); creation reveals God, its Creator (Jer 5: 20-24; Rom 1: 20); God support creation (Matt 6: 26); man is the crown of the creation of God, and that is why the entire creation is extremely valuable (Gen 1: 26-27; Ps 106: 24); the entire creation sings its prayer for the Creator (Neh 9: 5-6); the consequences of our sins affect our lives, the lives of our neighbors and also the entire creation (Gen 3: 17-19; Isa 24: 4-13; Jer 12: 4; Rom 8: 19-22); the Scripture condemns the destruction of the earth and predicts harsh punishments for those who do this (Lev 26: 40-43; Rev 11: 18); the Scripture teaches us that the earth belongs to the Lord that is why we cannot act our own will upon it (Gen 1: 1; Deut 10: 14; Col 1: 15-16); one of the first commandments that God gives to Adam is: take care of the creation (Gen 2: 15); the destruction of the creation is not allowed (Gen 1: 29; 1Tim 4: 4-5); the Scripture offers us an image of what creation will be at the end of times, it will be healed and restored (Isa 11: 6-9; Ezek 47: 6-12; Rom 8: 19-22; 2Peter 3: 13; Rev 21: 1; 22: 1-5 etc). For more information of the subject see Cătălin Varga, “Îndumnezeire și Restaurare între Typos și Antitypos în cea de-a doua Epistolă a Sfântului Apostol Petru,” *Studii Teologice* 1 (2015): 227-231; Ernst M. Conradie, “Toward an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay of the Earth Bible Project,” *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 123-135; Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Ecology and Theology: Ecojustice at the Center of the Church’s Mission,” *Interpretation* 4 (2011): 354-364; Felicia Dumas, „Orthodoxie et écologie en France,” *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science* 6 (2010): 184.

be approached by some of the authors of the New Testament⁴⁶. The miracles performed by Christ must be interpreted as a prefiguration and a renewal and healing of the entire creation⁴⁷, when the Savior offers the ground rules of the ethics of the new Kingdom, He stops just to two of them: *"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these"* (Mark 12: 29-31). Each of these commandments has an ecological side, surely to love God means to value the creation that He values⁴⁸, since He fights to free it from the work of darkness (Rom 8: 21-22⁴⁹). Because we live in the time and space situated between the fall of the creation and its recreation, anticipating and hoping for

⁴⁶ Ernest Lucas, "The New Testament teaching on the environment," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 93 (1999): 93-99; Edward Adams, "Does Awaiting New Heavens and a New Earth (2 Peter 3: 13) Mean Abandoning the Environment?," *The Expository Times* 4 (2010): 168-175; Edward Adams, "Retrieving the Earth from the Conflagration: 2 Peter 3: 5-13 and the Environment", in *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives*, ed. David G. Horrell, et al. (London: T.&T. Clark International, 2010), 108-120; G.Z. Heide, "What is New about the New Heaven and the New Earth? A Theology of Creation from Revelation 21 and 2 Peter 3," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 37-56.

⁴⁷ In fact, the Christological constitution of man can also be seen from his responsibility for the creation, as the one who is both recapitulation and conscience of the entire creation, as Theodore of Mopsuestiasays, because his image, who is Christ, is the Recapitulation and Savior of all things. See Theodoret of Cyr, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, PG 80, 109B.

⁴⁸ Here we have also had all sorts of theories regarding the age and destiny of the earth, and the researchers asked themselves what could be the biblical proofs that confirm the fact that the earth is much older than we can imagine. Unfortunately, there are only three options, in which the time that provides such an age must be comprised: a) during the week of the creation; b) before the week of the creation or c) after the week of the creation. And if this massive temporal equation cannot be comprised by these three variables, it becomes obvious the fact that the theory of an earth that is too old, has no biblical backup. See Bert Thompson, *The Bible and the Age of the Earth* (Montgomery: Apologetics Press, 2003), 15-17; Bert Thompson, *The Scientific Case for Creation* (Montgomery: Apologetics Press, 2004), 21-25.

⁴⁹ The text from Rom 8: 19-22 together with that from Col 1: 20 are the most quoted text by all the Biblicist ecologists because they express the future hope regarding the physical world of the New Testament. Most of the interpreters think that the term κτίσις ("creation") from Rom 8: 19 must refer in the Pauline thinking to the entire universe. Anyway, the transition from v. 22 to v. 23 excludes the faithful from the purpose of the creation presented in vv. 19-22, and through the noun ματαότης ("frustration") presented in v. 20, the apostle excludes any human intervention in general. Following the ideas of the prophets (Ps 66: 12-13; Isa 24: 4; Jer 4: 28), Apostle Paul portrays the image of the created world between these two limits: from its fall to its anticipated glory. See Douglas J. Moo, "Nature in the New Creation: New Testament Eschatology and the Environment," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 3 (2006): 453.

the redeeming intervention of God⁵⁰. The ethics of Christianity also includes the ethics of the manner in which we treat our land, in the incarnation, death and life of Jesus, God defeated the powers of darkness, sin and death, inaugurating His providence over the entire creation. This is the good news for the entire earth, because it proves the manner in which a fallen world is restored through the intervention of God⁵¹.

In the book of prophet Joel (chapters 1-2), the earth is not just a footstool for our feet nor the object of a human desire, the author focusing here the attention on the importance of the earth in general, says Braaten⁵², prophet Joel engaging a widely used concept: the earth cries for the sin of man, for the judgement of God or for a part of each of these. In all cases, people are urged to do the same, but they refuse this partnership with nature. Prophet Hosea (4: 1-3) presents earth as an active agent through which YHWH carries out His judgement within the people, and that is why the earth does not act outside God's sphere of manifestation. The earth plays an important part in each stage of the process led by YHWH: in the matter of summoning (4: 1b), in that of the judgement (4: 1d) and in that of the issue of the sentence ("*hence the earth mourns*" – 4: 3a⁵³).

God offers to the Jews the Land of Canaan with the purpose to live, work and flourish in it. The construction of houses, the plating of vineyards, marriage and all the other adjacent things constituted the essence of the life in the Promised Land. If this dimension of the life ceased, the consecrating wars no longer had a purpose. It is obvious the fact that all these exceptions from war prove that in God's plan, the important aspects of the life of His people were

⁵⁰ Mark Bredin, *The Ecology of the New Testament. Creation, Re-creation and the Environment* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 17.

⁵¹ Robert White and Jonathan Moo, "Environmental Apocalypse and Christian Hope," *Ethics in Brief* 1 (2011): 3.

⁵² Laurie J. Braaten, "Earth Community in Joel: A Call to Identify with the Rest of Creation," in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. N.C. Habel, et al. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 65.

⁵³ Melisa Tubbs Loya, "Therefore the Earth Mourns: The Grievance of Earth in Hosea 4: 1-3", *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 54-55; Ioan Chirilă, *Cartea Profetului Osea. Breviarum al Gnoseologiei Vechiului Testament* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 1999), 144: "*Verses 1-3 form a unity and may be considered as an introduction to the discourses that follow. The image of the process is not new for the book of Hosea... it is possible that Hosea is the creator of such genre of discourses that the prophets to come will assume willingly (Isa 3: 13; Jer 2: 9; Mic 6). This introduction may be divided into three parts, characteristic to each act of judgement: a) the prophet asks for the people's attention; b) the act of accusation; c) the punishment introduced by al-ken – imminent, immediate, because, the prophets says, the people lacks the knowledge of God and without this knowledge the people has neither emet – truth nor hesed – the wisdom of the love for its neighbor*".

much more important that the requirements of the army. And this is because of the conviction that victory depended, in the end, not on the army itself, but on the direct intervention of God in the economy of the war⁵⁴. Through this manner of approaching the war from a profoundly social and spiritual perspective, *qaddeṣu milhamâ* is completely different from exclusively human the structure of the Jihadist ideology, that has nothing to do with the divine-human history of the people of God.

This system of values inspired from the nomosic corpus defines the positive laws of God within which the concern for the familial paradigm abounds, as is the case of Deut 20. Surely, the most important part of the Law of Moses promoted the consecration of life, through the excelling of the priestly paradigm; while the area of the various aspects of life, of the human element, exceeded the beauty of life in its various social aspects. But all the aspects of the Law come into close relationship, based on the family nucleus dedicated to the fulfillment of the will of Yahweh, and this aspect made Israel a unique people on the face of the earth⁵⁵.

Conclusions

The war of God recorded in the history of the chosen people is unique in comparison with the other wars of the heathen nations, from the perspective of the following circumstances: (1) War is an action of man firstly, not of God, for He has nothing to do with the death of the sinner, but waits impatiently for his return. Israel is only a punitive and pedagogical instrument in the hand of God, the One Who reestablishes moral order in the land of Canaan. (2) Before the start of each battle, God's will was consulted through priestly oracles Urim and Thummim. Before every war, God was asked on the opportunity of a possible armed conflict and only after they received confirmation for the guidance of Yahweh the Israelites started the battle. (3) The war strategy was already established by God, the victory of the Jews came into close relationship with a scrupulous observation of the divine commandments. The divine strategy of the battle also comprised the presence of the priest before the army, carrying the tabernacle of the Lord, as a visible sign of the presence of God, the One Who involved actively into the wars of Jews, to raise the moral of the soldiers. Also, the consecration of the warriors before the fight through an ascetical exercise

⁵⁴ Peter C. Craigie, *Deuteronomul* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Logos, 2008), 310.

⁵⁵ Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics. A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 87-88.

well developed and through the purification sacrifices that invoked the providence of God by the priests, this is another strategy of divine law. (4) Any alliance or covenant with the nations given to death with God's consent is a practice strictly forbidden for Israel (the case of Joshua and the Gibeonites). (5) Last but not least, the wars accepted but not commanded by God consume according to a set of rules established by the Law of Moses, from where we may observe the social dimension of the fight, where Yahweh is careful with the smallest details of His soldiers, providing them with exceptions from the military duty based on various homelike reasons, a permission that could extend up to five years for the one who has recently planted a vineyard.

The consecrating war with is theological (Jer 6: 4; Mic 3: 5; Joel 4: 9) and social dimension is truly a vision of war completely different from that of the Jihadist ideology, which promotes the so-called "holy war". Israel does not fight for a forceful conversion of the heathen nations to the monotheistic faith, but to claim the land of Canaan, inherited directly from God, through the covenant He made with Abraham. The wars after the conquest of Canaan, in the pre-monarchal and monarchal era, are wars for the consolidation of the Holy Land. The side-slips observed in the case of the kings Saul, David, Ahab and others who fight without God's approval are mere incidents that depreciate the consecrating context of *qaddešu milhamâ*.

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